



**MEETING OF THE  
ST. JOHN'S TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

**REGULAR BUSINESS**

A meeting of the St. John's Transportation was held on Thursday, July 23, 2020 at Noon at the Metrobus Transit Centre, 25 Messenger Drive, St. John's. The meeting was streamed live via Webex.

Present at the meeting were:

Ian Froude	Chair/Councillor
Shawn Skinner	Vice Chair
Colleen Galgay	Commissioner
Dave Lane	Commissioner/City Councillor (via phone)
Hope Jamieson	Commissioner/City Councillor
Derek Coffey	Deputy City Manager, Financial Management
Kirsten Morry	Commissioner
Judy Powell	General Manager
Linda Ryan	Administrative Assistant

Absent:	Paul Walsh	Commissioner
	Kevin Breen	City Manager

### **I. PROCEDURAL**

- The Chair called the meeting to order.
- L. Ryan recorded the minutes of the meeting.

### **II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA/MINUTES**

- It was moved by Vice Chair Skinner and seconded by Commissioner Galgay that the agenda for this meeting date be approved.
- It was moved by Commissioner Jamieson and seconded by Commissioner Lane that the minutes of the Commission meeting of June 25, 2020 be adopted as distributed.

### **III. BUSINESS ARISING**

#### **1. COVID-19—Update**

##### **➤ RIDERSHIP/MAXIMUM PASSENGER LOADS**

- July average weekday ridership is approximately 52% compared to July 2019 weekday levels.
- Under COVID-19 Alert Level II, and as per Eastern Health guidelines, the 19-passenger limit remains in place. There has been no decision at this point with respect to increasing the limit.
- There have been a few cases having to deny customers due to the on-board maximum capacity, and service continues to be closely monitored. A spare/standby bus remains in service each day for passengers who cannot board due to the maximum load limits
- If a customer who has been denied boarding due to maximum capacity on board and needs to arrive at their destination at a specified time (for work, for example), alternate transportation is provided; either a transit supervisor in a company van is dispatched or a taxi is arranged. Most customers, however, are understanding of the challenges in these times.
- It is hoped that a discussion can be held with Eastern Health in the near future concerning maximum passenger loads.



**1. COVID-19—Update**

➤ **MASKS**

- Approximately 10-15% of passengers are wearing masks on board local transit. This may be attributed to the perception that COVID-19 risk here appears to be low presently.
- The Vice Chair inquired if there is concern surrounding the use (or lack thereof) of masks on board. The General Manager informed that masks and physical distancing are encouraged at all systems across the country as appropriate customer behavior in protecting themselves and other riders.
- At other Canadian transit systems where passenger behavior is not compliant with wearing masks, additional steps have been taken to make it mandatory. Some transit agencies in Ontario, for example, have announced that masks will be mandatory on buses. Calgary City Council recently passed a bylaw requiring people to wear masks in all indoor public buildings and when travelling on public transit in the city.
- The Chair advised that he has received several requests to make masks mandatory on Metrobus Transit. Following the advice of the Province's Chief Medical Officer of Health, he would prefer to leave the decision to the Department of Eastern Health for Newfoundland and Labrador.
- GoBus returned to regular service hours on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Use has increased slightly since Level II was introduced but remains low at approximately 30% of daily normal levels.
- The Vice Chair asked if GoBus users could be considered as being more at risk for contracting the COVID-19 virus and if this might be a potential factor resulting in lower ridership levels. It was noted that individuals with health issues could be considered, as a percentage, to be at greater risk.

➤ **SEPTEMBER, 2020 SERVICE**

- The Chair called for a decision regarding September, 2020 service. Members were asked to consider:

- whether or not to maintain the existing (COVID-19) schedule in the Fall, which is a somewhat modified Summer schedule, or implement another modified level of service (such as a summer schedule)
- shift to a full-on, regular Fall schedule (that would happen in any September), or some other modification of a Fall schedule,
- shift to a regular Fall schedule without the Express Routes (13, 24 and 26 that primarily serve post-secondary institutions), and/or without the planned enhancements to the Frequent Transit Network (FTN)

- Three (3) potential service options were presented by the General Manager in advance of the meeting for deliberation (assuming FTN improvements do not proceed, and an alternate modified service is not proposed):

- 1) current COVID-19 service schedule
- 2) regular summer service schedule
- 3) regular fall service schedule (excluding express routes)

<b>MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUMMER AND COVID-19 SERVICE SCHEDULES</b>		
<b>Route</b>	<b>Summer Schedule</b>	<b>COVID-19 Schedule</b>
5	•Evening service to increase frequency on one section of route 2 from 60-minutes to 30-minutes from the east end to the Avalon Mall (resulting in 60-minute frequency on both the east and west portions of the route 2 evenings)	
12	•30-minute frequency to 6:00 pm	•60-minute frequency
15	•Extra route at peak times to provide 30-minute frequency	•60-minute frequency all day
18/15	•In service at peak times to provide 30-minute frequency	•Not in service
26	•A single run in the morning to serve MUN	•Not in service

**1. COVID-19—Update**

➤ **SEPTEMBER, 2020 SERVICE** (Continued)

<b>MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUMMER SCHEDULE AND FALL SERVICE SCHEDULES</b>		
<b>Route</b>	<b>Summer Schedule</b>	<b>Fall Regular Schedule</b>
Core Routes 1, 2, 3, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•30-minute frequency all day to 6 PM</li> <li>•60-minute frequency after 6 PM</li> </ul>	15-minute frequency during peak times on the core routes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•30-minute frequency to 8 PM</li> <li>•60-minute frequency after 6 PM</li> </ul>
Express Routes 13, 24, 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The Express Routes provide direct service to MUN and College of the North Atlantic.</li> <li>•These routes do not operate during summer.</li> </ul>	
15, 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•30-minute frequency only during peak times</li> <li>•60-minute frequency at all other times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•30-minute frequency all day to 6 PM</li> <li>•60-minute frequency after 6 PM</li> </ul>

• Points considered are outlined below:

- MUN and CNA have announced that classes will be online for the Fall affecting 30% of transit ridership.
- Vice Chair Skinner noted that it is not accurate for people to think that all post-secondary institutions here have cancelled in-person classes for the upcoming Fall semester. Other than Memorial University or College of the North Atlantic, some trades colleges have submitted proposals to the Department of Education for resuming in-person classes in September. These include carpentry, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, masonry, hair styling, etc. A response has not yet been received from the Province whether or not the proposed plan has been approved.
- Further, some institutions may offer a combination of virtual and in-person classes, such as medical school.
- Indications are that many workplaces will remain at current staffing levels onsite until at least sometime later in the Fall.
- It is unlikely that major changes in retail will occur beyond present restrictions (although hours of business may be extended).
- As the economy reopens, ridership is increasing, even though it is not expected to reach pre-pandemic levels for some time to come.
- Many transit systems across the country are expecting ridership to be at only 50-70% of normal levels in the Fall.
- A recent survey indicated that 25-30% of Canadians feel uncomfortable about returning to crowded places (transit, malls, airplanes, cinemas, etc.) until there is a vaccine.
- Since the pandemic, there is not the normal travel pattern of an AM and PM peak. Currently, the most challenging time of day for accommodating passengers (particularly on busier routes 2, 3 and 10), due to capacity limits, is mid-to-late afternoon.
- If a summer service schedule is implemented for Fall, an option is to have floater buses on standby to respond to busy areas to provide flexibility for a few weeks until fall ridership patterns are established, rather than commit to a full fall service (with the risk of having more service than needed throughout the City).
- The limit of 19 passengers locally is expected to remain for the foreseeable future. Whatever level of service is in place, customers will not be able to board if the passenger load is at maximum capacity.
- If the decision is to move to regular Fall service (without Express Routes), should alternate service continue to be provided for passengers who are unable to board due to reaching capacity?

## 1. COVID-19—Update

### ➤ **SEPTEMBER, 2020 SERVICE** (Continued)

- Commissioner Morry suggested that transit return to a full regular service schedule in the Fall, if at all possible, as it is the Commission's societal mandate to provide mobility for those who need it to participate in economic and social activities.
- Commissioner Lane also suggested returning, in principle, to a normal, full Fall schedule that people are accustomed to, so that service is available in a consistent manner and makes things easier for customers.
- He noted that any time a route is changed, it is confusing to customers and riders are lost, at least for a time. Whatever measures can be taken to sustain a regular service (with only minor adjustments based on travel patterns and demand which are, at least at this point, unpredictable) in which people have a consistent expectation, the better.
- He suggested communicating to the public that transit is still here, operating safely and reliably.
- The General Manager advised that once ridership patterns are established in the fall, additional buses could be added during the peak times if demand warrants.
- She offered that with the Union's cooperation, it can be done reasonably quickly but would depend on staff working with the Union in waiving certain contractual items contained in the Collective Agreement.
- She credited the Amalgamated Transit Union (Local 1452) who has been very cooperative and helpful in working with staff to make adjustments to the service during the pandemic.
- She cautioned however, that returning the fleet to full service on short notice might prove to be challenging because obtaining vehicle parts from manufacturers in the U.S. is difficult at this time.
- D. Coffey raised that the Commission presently has a \$1.1 million surplus based on cost savings to date. The decision to re-introduce a full service in September with unknown demand, would be a \$1.1 million decision.
- He felt that the public would not be shocked if the Commission were to introduce a modified service in the Fall.
- The General Manager informed that if service was to remain at a similar level, it could translate to a potential total savings of \$2 million by year's end. This figure represents, in part, the assumption that GoBus ridership remains at 30% of pre-pandemic levels.
- She added, that a reduced schedule, however, would allow for greater flexibility in terms of staffing and availability of floater buses in peak times.
- The Chair agreed with the implementation of the regular Fall schedule with the exception of the Express Routes; these routes primarily serve post-secondary institutions during extreme peak demand times.
- He cited additional layers surrounding this issue include actions to attract ridership, and part of that issue is reliability and frequency of service for customers.
- He further noted there is no clear timeline for the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour's low-income transit fare program. Conversations are still happening around this initiative developed for individuals of financial need to enable them contribute to the local economy and social fabric of the city (i.e. to work, shop, attend medical appointments and take part in social/recreational opportunities).
- He observed that ridership is currently at 52% (32% of riders are students who are presently not attending classes). Balancing the remaining 18% of customers, ridership is not looking that much different than normal at the moment.
- Commissioner Jamieson stated that she would not want riders to get in their heads the narrative, "I'm going to try and take the bus and hope it works out."
- Given there is so much uncertainty in responding to the pandemic, she would prefer to offer at the outset, more service than not enough service and consequently irrevocable ridership losses.
- She inquired of the General Manager the quickness with which adjustments can be made to reduce service in response to lower demand

## **1. COVID-19—Update**

### ➤ **SEPTEMBER, 2020 SERVICE** (Continued)

- Vice Chair Skinner suggested that while the practice is to offer a service that is subsidized, in part, by fare revenues (plus other revenue) versus the total system operating cost, the goal at this time is to continue the Commission's commitment to citizens by providing a full, quality service for those who need it.
- He acknowledged that when ridership patterns are known at the end of September, adjustments can then possibly be made to reduce service, if necessary, to more accurately reflect the travel needs of customers and their expectations.
- The Chair asked how members felt, if a full schedule were to be implemented, about continuing alternate service arrangements for customers who cannot board because of maximum capacity loads (currently at the 19- passenger restriction per bus), and should it be maintained only on specific routes and not lower-frequency routes.
- The General Manager advised that providing alternate transportation (floater bus, supervisor van or taxi) is a balancing act between resources, judgment and the need of passengers to reach a destination at a specified time. The caution is not to become a taxi service (@\$2.50/taxi ride).

#### **ACTION I:**

- After considerable discussion, Commissioner Morry moved the following:
  - A regular Fall schedule shall be adopted with modifications to remove the Express Routes that primarily serve post-secondary institutions during peak times of the day.
  - A review of ridership patterns and demand shall be performed at the end of September and any adjustments, corresponding to demand, be made where needed.
  - Timelines for various transit priority improvements as per the Metrobus/GoBus Review and recommendations contained in the Dillon Report (Frequent Transit Network/FTN) shall be deferred.
- Commissioner Jamieson seconded the motion, and it was unanimously carried.

#### **ACTION II:**

- It was moved by Commissioner Jamieson that:
  - Upon return to full regular service in September, alternate transportation shall not be provided (on lower-frequency routes) for customers who are unable to board because of maximum capacity loads.
- Vice Chair Skinner seconded the motion, and it was unanimously carried.

## **2. Policy—Request for Information in an Emergency**

- The policy surrounding release of private information in the event of an emergency, complete with revisions and additions as suggested at the June 25<sup>th</sup> business meeting of the Commission was tabled for members' information.

## **3. New Transit Operator Training Program**

- In-person interviews were completed and five (5) candidates were selected to participate in the Transit Operator Training Program which commenced mid-July.
- Two (2) of the five (5) recruits have renounced their participation in the first week of the program for personal reasons; three (3) new trainees remain in the program to date.
- There have been several unexpected retirements in recent weeks (COVID19 has been a factor in those retirements). If necessary, a second training program will be initiated later in the summer.

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Financial Statements**

The financial statements for the month of June, 2020 were tabled and reviewed.

**2. Executive Summary**

➤ The Executive Summary for the month of June, 2020 was tabled for members' information.

**GOBUS ASSESSMENTS**

- Eligibility assessments resumed on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Horizon has implemented all appropriate COVID-19 precautions as per provincial public health directives and are working to reschedule missed appointments.
- Vice Chair Skinner inquired regarding the progress of the GoBus eligibility assessments. It was noted that the Manager of Accessible Transit reports on this item in her monthly statistical report. June statistics are noted below:

<b>GOBUS ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENTS, JUNE 2020</b>		
	<b>June</b>	<b>Totals to Date</b>
Assessments completed	21	84
New applicants	12	44
Existing customers	9	40
Approved (unconditional)	20	73
Denied	0	2
Conditional/Temporary approval*	1	9
Accounts Closed**	2	17
Missed Appointments (No-shows/late cancels)	12	

- As per recommendations contained in the Dillon report, all existing GoBus customers and new GoBus applicants are required to participate in the eligibility assessment process.
- There is currently a backlog of 2,000 individual assessments. Efforts are being made to assess new applicants as quickly as possible.
- Progress to date in completing the assessments has been slow. Horizon began its assessments last fall, prior to Christmas break in December, followed by "Snowmageddon" and its aftermath in January, and the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March, 2020. It has been an unusual year and Horizon continues to work through the issues arising from the challenges.

**ACTION:**

➤ D. Power, Manager of Accessible Transit, will be asked to provide an update in person at the August Commission meeting.

**OTHER**

- Vice Chair Skinner noted the elevator inspection certificate expired 2018.
- The General Manager will check with the Maintenance Manager regarding this item.

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**REGULAR BUSINESS**

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### **V. OTHER (Information/Community)**

- There was no other business to discuss at this time.

### **VI. ADJOURNMENT**

- There being no further regular business to discuss, the meeting be adjourned at approximately 1:30 PM.
- Live streaming ended followed by an in-camera business meeting of the Commission.
- The next regular business meeting of the Commission will be held on Thursday, August 27, 2020 commencing at Noon.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ian Froude  
Chair

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Linda Ryan  
Administrative Assistant